



INFORMATION AND IDEOLOGICAL ATTACKS AS A FACTOR IN THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital communication has transformed the environment in which young people acquire political information, develop civic attitudes, and construct political identities. For Central Asian societies, this transformation creates both opportunities for political learning and risks associated with misinformation, disinformation, manipulative narratives, hate speech, and other forms of information and ideological pressure. This article examines the mechanisms through which information and ideological attacks may influence the formation of political culture among youth in Central Asia. Drawing on contemporary scholarship on political socialization, political information literacy, social media use, and digital disinformation, the study develops a conceptual framework linking the information environment with political knowledge, political values, trust, participation, and political behavior. Particular attention is paid to the role of media and information literacy as a protective factor. The article argues that the influence of hostile or manipulative information should not be understood as an automatic causal effect: young people interpret content through existing political orientations, peer networks, family and educational institutions, and platform-specific communication practices. A sustainable response therefore requires not only counter-disinformation measures but also the development of critical political information literacy and constructive forms of youth participation.

1. Introduction

Digital communication has become an important environment of political learning. Young people increasingly encounter information about public affairs through social networking sites, video platforms, messaging applications, influencers, and algorithmically selected news feeds.

These environments can expand access to political information and facilitate civic participation, but they can also accelerate the circulation of misleading or manipulative content. Recent scholarship emphasizes that political misinformation is a global problem that can distort public discourse and weaken trust, while also noting the need for comparative research beyond Western contexts. [1]

The issue is particularly relevant for Central Asia, where young people constitute an important social group and where political communication is increasingly mediated by digital technologies. A 2023 UNESCO assessment conducted in the Fergana Valley specifically examined media and information literacy among youth and highlighted the growing importance of people's capacity to interpret, use, and create media content safely. [2] In Kyrgyzstan, recent UNESCO-supported initiatives have also identified online disinformation, hate speech, and polarization as challenges affecting social cohesion and the digital environment. [3]

The problem, however, should not be reduced to the simple assumption that exposure to harmful information automatically produces a particular political attitude. Political culture develops through a combination of socialization agents, previous experiences, values, institutional trust, peer communication, education, and media use. Research on youth political learning shows that youth culture itself can function as an important context of political socialization, influencing young people's capacity to discuss political issues, analyze conflicts, and express political values. [4]

The purpose of this article is therefore to conceptualize the influence of information and ideological attacks on the formation of political culture among Central Asian youth and to identify the mechanisms that may strengthen young people's resilience to manipulative political communication.

2. Literature Review

Political culture is commonly understood as a set of political orientations, values, beliefs, expectations, and behavioral dispositions through which individuals relate to political institutions and processes. In the case of youth, political culture is closely connected with political socialization—the process through which individuals acquire political knowledge, values, identities, and patterns of participation.

The digital environment has altered traditional patterns of political socialization. Family, school, university, and traditional media remain important, but young people now encounter political messages through decentralized networks in which professional journalism competes with influencers, peer-generated content, anonymous channels, and algorithmic recommendations. Research among young adults in different Asian societies demonstrates that social media can increase exposure to public-affairs content and facilitate interaction with journalists and activists. [5]

At the same time, social media use can have heterogeneous effects. Research on adolescents and young adults indicates that some platforms are associated with higher political interest and civic engagement, while particular forms of social media use may also be associated with affective polarization. [6] This suggests that digital media should be viewed neither exclusively as a threat nor exclusively as an instrument of democratization.

An increasingly important concept in this discussion is political information literacy. Koren's systematic review describes political information literacy as a set of competencies

needed to navigate complex political information environments, including misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. Such competencies are especially important during adolescence and young adulthood because this is a formative period for political beliefs and civic attitudes. [7]

Another relevant development is the growing role of social media influencers as political information sources. A cross-country study of young people found that many respondents were able to identify a preferred political influencer, with political activity, perceived opinion-leader status, and other individual characteristics shaping reliance on such sources. [8] This demonstrates that political information flows are increasingly personalized and socially mediated.

3. Methodology

The article employs a qualitative conceptual research design based on interdisciplinary analysis of scholarship on political culture, political socialization, youth political participation, social media, misinformation, and media and information literacy. The analytical unit is the relationship between digital information exposure and components of political culture among youth.

The study uses comparative contextual analysis to interpret the Central Asian environment. The regional perspective includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, while recognizing that their political systems, media environments, languages, and levels of digital openness differ. Consequently, the article does not assume a uniform regional effect.

The analytical framework distinguishes four interconnected stages: (1) exposure to information and ideological content; (2) interpretation and evaluation of that content; (3) transformation of information into political attitudes and values; and (4) expression through political or civic behavior. Media and political information literacy are treated as moderating competencies that may reduce susceptibility to manipulative content.

The approach is deliberately non-deterministic. Information and ideological attacks are considered a potential influence rather than a universal cause. This distinction is essential because the same message can produce different responses depending on prior political knowledge, trust, identity, peer networks, educational background, and perceived source credibility.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis indicates that information and ideological attacks can affect political culture through several interconnected mechanisms.

First, repeated exposure can influence the informational basis of political knowledge. When young people encounter politically relevant claims without reliable verification, inaccurate or distorted information may become incorporated into their understanding of institutions, public actors, or political events. The problem is intensified by algorithmic environments in which emotionally salient content can attract attention and circulation.

Second, manipulative content can influence political trust. Disinformation may seek not only to promote a false claim but also to create generalized uncertainty: if users cannot distinguish credible information from fabricated content, they may become distrustful of both institutions and professional media. This mechanism is particularly important for political

culture because institutional trust is connected with willingness to engage constructively in public life.

Third, information and ideological attacks can affect political values and identity. Polarizing narratives may frame political issues as conflicts between social, ethnic, regional, religious, or generational groups. In such circumstances, political identity can become increasingly defined through opposition to an imagined 'other'. Recent UNESCO work in Kyrgyzstan, for example, identifies online disinformation and polarization as factors that can deepen social and regional divisions. [3]

Fourth, digital information environments can modify political participation. The effect is ambivalent. Social media can encourage civic expression, discussion, mobilization, and contact with public actors. At the same time, manipulated information can encourage hostile forms of participation, political cynicism, withdrawal, or polarization. Research on young people confirms that online media can both facilitate participation and reproduce inequalities associated with pre-existing political interest. [9]

Fifth, the influence of information attacks is mediated by the quality of political information literacy. A young person who can identify the source of a claim, distinguish fact from opinion, compare multiple sources, recognize emotional manipulation, and verify visual or statistical evidence is less dependent on the first political narrative encountered. Thus, media and information literacy should be considered not merely a technical skill but a component of contemporary political culture.

For Central Asian youth, the linguistic and cultural dimension is particularly important. Political content circulates in multiple languages, while platform moderation and verification mechanisms may not operate equally across all linguistic contexts. Recent research and initiatives in Kyrgyzstan have highlighted limitations in local-language content moderation and the risks created by the mismatch between global platforms and local linguistic and cultural contexts. [10] This suggests that regional approaches to information resilience should include local-language media literacy, culturally relevant educational materials, and cooperation among universities, civil society, journalists, and digital platforms.

The conceptual model proposed in this article can therefore be expressed as follows: information and ideological attacks constitute an external informational pressure; the digital environment determines the speed and visibility of exposure; individual and social factors shape interpretation; political information literacy moderates susceptibility; and the resulting changes may appear in political knowledge, trust, values, identity, and participation.

This model also has an important policy implication. Countering harmful information solely through removal or prohibition is unlikely to be sufficient. A sustainable strategy should increase the capacity of young people to independently evaluate political information. UNESCO's work in Uzbekistan similarly emphasizes the importance of media and information literacy for enabling people, particularly youth, to interpret and create media content while maintaining personal safety. [2]

5. Conclusion

Information and ideological attacks represent an important challenge to the formation of political culture among Central Asian youth, but their effects should be understood through a multidimensional political-socialization framework. Digital communication can simultaneously

expand political knowledge and participation and increase exposure to misinformation, manipulation, polarization, and distrust.

The principal protective factor identified in the conceptual analysis is political information literacy, understood as the ability to access, evaluate, contextualize, verify, and critically interpret political information. Strengthening this competence should be integrated into higher education, youth policy, civic education, and professional journalism training.

For Central Asian countries, future empirical research should move beyond general assessments of social media use and measure specific relationships between exposure to manipulative content and changes in political knowledge, institutional trust, political values, identity, and participation. Comparative surveys among young people in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, combined with content analysis and interviews, could provide a stronger evidence base for understanding regional differences.

Ultimately, resilience to information and ideological attacks should not be defined as passive resistance to information. It should be understood as an active civic competence: the ability of young citizens to seek reliable information, evaluate competing claims, participate in political dialogue, and make informed judgments without becoming dependent on manipulative narratives.

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